

Talking Points
Signing of Senate Bill 2604
March 24, 2006

I want to begin today with two observations and then talk about a few specifics of Senate Bill 2604, which I officially received from the Legislature on Tuesday

First, I am a product of public education. About 90% of our K-12 students are in public schools. I applaud the students, teachers, administrators and taxpayers who work hard in the cooperative venture we know as public education. It matters to Mississippi now and for our future.

Education is the number one economic development issue and the number one quality of life issue in our state. It is rightly our top priority. We spend about 63 percent of our budget on education.

State spending on K-12 education is 7.2 percent, or \$143 million, higher this year than last year. It has gone up every year I've been Governor and will continue to do so.

Per student spending in our public schools is more than \$7,000 this year, a record amount.

But the issue is deeper than just knowing that the majority of the Mississippi state budget already goes for education; we must ensure the dollars are spent wisely and well; that the taxpayers and, more important, the students are getting their money's worth.

Which leads to my second observation:

Senate Bill 2604 is a realistic and responsible approach to get to where we all want to be, and it seems to me it will depoliticize the debate on education funding ... which needs to be done.

With the provisions of Senate Bill 2604, this ramp-up of MAEP funding over the next four years must be the road to significant achievement ... what you might call "smart funding" as we try to come out of a time of fiscal uncertainty.

SB 2604 represents a multi-year commitment to funding K-12 in Mississippi.

We shouldn't fear the words "multi-year" because the same words – representing the same kind of commitment – resulted in:

- Higher teacher pay: This year our school teachers have received a second consecutive 8 percent pay raise, and they are making 30 percent more than five years ago.
- Also a multi-year plan resulted.
- A highway construction program that benefited the state and all sections of the state through a multi-year commitment to building more and better roads and bridges.

SB 2604 sets us in a similar multi-year path that will result in stable, predictable increased K-12 funding.

Of special note to me: High growth districts experiencing a significantly above average increase in enrollment over three years prior to the current funding year will receive an additional allocation. The effect of this is that high growth districts are now funded within the MAEP formula. I'd like the extra allocation to be higher but this is the first time high growth districts get any extra funding, so I support it.

Let's commit that Senate Bill 2604 not only results in increased funding but also in increased learning. Better and better results. Results, after all, are what matter. How much do our children learn, and what are we doing to achieve greater increases in learning.